Q&A with Congressional Green Schools Caucus Co-Chair Robert J. Dold: Adlai E. Stevenson High School's Energy Reduction Efforts

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Last week, Congressman Robert J. Dold (IL-10) visited Adlai E. Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire, IL to recognize the school's LEED Gold for Existing Buildings certification and energy-reduction efforts. The 833,000 square foot campus was able to achieve a 7 percent reduction in energy usage and an increase in indoor environmental quality. The school's sustainability efforts led to integration of sustainable teachings within the school curriculum, including a recycling program that has increased waste stream management and reduced paper usage.

Congressman Dold is a long-time supporter of green schools efforts, and is a co-chair of the Congressional Green Schools Caucus. He joined the Center for Green School's staff for a Q&A on Stevenson High School's achievements:

How did you first become interested with efficiency in schools?

With my interest in protecting the environment and providing the best possible atmosphere at school for our students to succeed- it has been a natural fit. Furthermore, the long-term cost savings to schools will benefit our children as budgets continue to be stretched. This will allow school administrators to spend less on overhead and more on education for our students.

Can you describe your involvement with the Congressional Green Schools Caucus?

As co-chair of the Green Schools Caucus I work closely with our other co-chairs, Representatives Chandler and Matheson, to educate other Members of Congress and develop policies that benefit our communities, promote learning, and save the taxpayer money. The Caucus has already hosted a briefing on Capitol Hill given by education experts and green school industry leaders to provide background and real world success stories. We are currently working on setting up a tour of a local green school near the Capitol in the near future for staff and Members.

Congressman Dold and Stevenson staff with LEED plaque

Can you talk about your impressions of Stevenson after visiting this week?

I have to commend Stevenson High School for all their hard work in achieving the first LEED gold-level certification for an existing public high school building in the nation. This clearly is a team effort- every student, every teacher and every person associated with the school has come together to make Stevenson a green school. Whether students are participating in recycling programs or classes are planting a garden or school administrators are adjusting the lighting and temperature- everyone who utilizes this facility is aware and actively engaged in making sure that they do their part to help clean up the environment.

How has the high school used sustainability initiatives to reduce their overall operating costs and reduce energy consumption?

Right now Stevenson High School is saving approximately $100,000 a year because of their LEED initiatives. From regulating the temperature when the school is closed, to adjusting the lighting and planting a garden on the roof- all of these efforts have cooperatively led to more cost efficiency at the school.

How can other schools use Adlai E. Stevenson as a role model for adopting environmental and sustainable practices?

Other schools can get everyone involved. The reason Stevenson High School is so effective is because everyone has a stake in the success of this project. By encouraging one another to participate, it not only helps the school save costs, it will also have an impact in student's home and the way they view the environment from here on forward.

This is a great example of how a school has recognized the importance of environmentally-friendly practices by achieving LEED certification. What advice would you give students or parents looking to also go for LEED certification in their school?

Going for an LEED certification is unique endeavor that involves the entire community. It requires active participation from the school board, teachers,

students, and parents. Making certain the community is participating makes a big difference because when everyone has a vested interest in success, the results are better and everyone feels a sense of accomplishment.

Make going for a certification a learning experience and teaching tool for the students. Stevenson actively engaged their science classes in the process by incorporating their analysis of flow rates of sinks and showers in their plans. Students can then take this knowledge and appreciation for sustainability practices and use it in the future.

Why should the issue of green schools matter to students, faculty and parents across the country?

Students deserve an environment that is healthy and promotes learning. Study after study has shown the positive educational benefits that are associated with schools going green. The other side is that sustainability and efficiency practices save school districts money by decreasing energy bills and operating costs. Those saved resources can be used to make additional investments in our children's education.

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